MANHATTAN PLAZA HD-S

What Satellite & Digital TV ★SILVER★

Manhattan takes on the premium cost of Freesat HD receivers without compromising on quality

ALTHOUGH a few satellite receivers offer extensive access to other channels (even other satellites with the right antenna), swapping between viewing Freesat and non-Freesat channels – even on the same 28°E satellite – is a tedious business.

This machine is not only a very competent Freesat HD receiver but also great for watching both Freesat and non-Freesat channels on 28°E – and it's cheap to boot.

Build and connectivity

It has to be said that the HD-S looks not unlike the cheapest of Freesat machines. It's small (the size of a book) and with no front panel display to suggest it is anything but a budget box. But don't be fooled.

The size is partly down to the separate power supply. We don't like this approach because, though it reduces the size (and temperature) of the set-top box, it clutters the mains sockets behind your TV.

Finished in black plastic, the HD-S looks plain. The front panel folds down to reveal the standard power, channel up/down and volume up/down buttons, with no other controls to speak of.

The remote is a bit small but nicely laid out (although the Back and Exit keys are too easy to press accidentally) with decent-sized and well-spaced keys. There are several dedicated keys, for display mode, favourites, swap channels, and so on, as well as the usual Freesat Guide, List, and coloured buttons.

The back panel is fairly crowded – if only because it's so small. There is one LNB input without loopthrough and with no DiSEqC support. This is a great shame – DiSEqC from this machine could elevate it to an enthusiast receiver too.

An HDMI is supplemented with TV and VCR Scarts and there's an optical digital audio output too.

An Ethernet socket is provided for

FEATURES

No LNB inputs: 1
LNB loopthrough: Yes
DiSEqC: No
No. channels:
Selectable FEC: No
Symbol rate range: 2000-45000
Blind search: No
Linux: No
CAM: None
Common interface: None

Teletext: DVB decoded
EPG support: DVB now-and-next, 8-day
Timer: Unlimited events, 8-day
Hard drive: None

UHF modulator tuning: N/A
Software upgrade: OTA or USB download
Data ports: USB, Ethernet

AV outputs
SD out: TV Scart (composite) RGB, VCR Scart (composite)
HD out: HDMI
Audio out: Stereo analogue audio, co-ax digital audio

THE OPPOSITION

Bush BFSAT01HD
■ About the same price but without the picture quality nor non-Freesat convenience, and much slower to search
■ **http://bit.ly/kOvtrl**

Technisat HDFS
■ With media streaming, DiSEqC and other satellites searching for enthusiasts, but less convenient non-Freesat navigation and around twice the price
■ **http://bit.ly/qnPebu**

TEST AND MEASUREMENT

	Recording	In use	Idling	Standby (power saving on)
	-	9W	-	1W

	POWER USAGE	SEARCH 28°E	SEARCH 19°E	SEARCH 13°E
		Freesat Scan 1m 5sec	FTA Scan n/a	FTA Scan n/a
		FTA scan 2m 53sec	Full scan n/a	Full scan n/a
		Full scan n/a	Blind Search n/a	Blind Search n/a
		Blind Search n/a		
	In standby the HD-S checks for updates then switches to 1W power consumption after around 2 mins	You can scan 28°E for Freesat only or all FTA channels. The HD-S proves reasonably fast at doing both	The HD-S can only scan one transponder at a time for positions other than 28°E	Again, while you can add channels from other satellites, general searches of sats other than 28°E can't be made

VIDEO FORMATS	
MPEG-2 TS	●
AVI	●
DivX	●
XviD	●
MKV	●
MP4	●

broadband connection (for BBC iPlayer and – maybe soon – ITV Player). The USB socket is for software upgrade only.

Setup

The HD-S follows the same setup process as most Freesat receivers: you turn on, set TV details, check the signal levels, enter your postcode (you can use either the number keys *á la* texting, or an onscreen keyboard) and start the search, which takes just 65 seconds.

For non-Freesat channels it's barely more complicated. The menu gives the option of searching one transponder (a Manual Scan) or all of them (Automatic Scan). The Automatic Scan is pretty fast, taking under three minutes, and turns up all the channels not already found by the Freesat scan.

The scan only looks for transponders on 28°E so it can't be used for other satellites (say, with a manual LNB switch). However, the Manual Scan can be used for individual transponders on any satellite. It will recognise any combination of SD, HD, DVB-S, DVB-S2, MPEG-2 and MPEG-4 (clear channels only, of course).

Basic use

The channel navigation of the HD-S is rather Freesat-constrained but simple to use. The channel list adopts the 'press OK once to preview a channel, again to tune to it' approach. Removing channels from the list is done from the same screen, which makes life simpler.

A press of the left and right keys switches between Freesat and non-Freesat, TV and radio lists, so selection of channels on and off the official radar is quick and simple.

Unfortunately there's no list sorting – not even for non-Freesat channels – but a very efficient channel search (again with the onscreen keyboard option) finds mislaid channels quickly.

The EPG is the Freesat norm (pressing Guide a second time, conveniently skips the annoying Freesat genre selection screen) displaying a grid of programmes across eight channels, with icons to show those with an HD alternative. You can jump two hours or a day forwards or back and set the timer to automatically tune to the channel at the time of a highlighted show (with a clash warning, if necessary).

The HD-S also offers a sleep timer for up to 90 minutes, and timers to turn on (on a preset channel) or off the receiver at a set time each day.

The highlight of the HD-S navigation is the favourite channels system. There are eight lists, which can be renamed. The star key on the remote then brings up the lists for quick channel selection.

Usefully, favourites can be populated with any channel stored in the receiver, so you can create a list of, say news channels, which includes BBC News and Sky News (as well as CNN, Euronews, France 24, an so on) to seamlessly slip from Freesat to non-Freesat channels.

Performance

HD channels such as BBC HD look simply stunning, with brilliant colours and crisp, clear detail.

Sound quality, too, is well above average for this class of receiver and SD channels are upscaled well to produce first-rate pictures. SD via Scart is a little disappointing – a touch dull and lifeless compared with the superlative HDMI output ■

Geoff Bains

VERDICT

The Plaza HD-S is an extremely capable Freesat HD receiver. The simple switching between Freesat and non-Freesat channel lists and the favourites system makes it a good choice for anyone wanting everything that 28°E has to offer.

Its reception performance is excellent and it will even find enthusiast friends. That it's probably the cheapest Freesat HD receiver around as well makes choosing the HD-S a no-brainer.

RATINGS

PLUS
- Excellent picture
- Easy non-Freesat access
- Cheap

MINUS
- Separate power supply
- No DiSEqC
- No other satellites/ blind search

Build	★★★★★★★★★★
Setup	★★★★★★★★★★
Searching	★★★★★★★★★★
Navigation	★★★★★★★★★★
Performance	★★★★★★★★★★
Features	★★★★★★★★★★
Value	★★★★★★★★★★
Overall	

81%

CONNECTIVITY

1. LNB input
2. Ethernet network connection
3. USB data connection
4. Optical digital audio output
5. HDMI
6. TV Scart
7. VCR Scart
8. Power input